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By HARRY MOORE.



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CHAPTER I.

IN THE HANDS OF THE TORIES

"Well, young man, if you've anything to say, say it now, for your time has come."

A thrilling scene.

Halfway up the side of a mountain in western South Carolina, close beside the trail which wound and twisted its course like the trail left by some huge serpent, stood a party of perhaps a dozen men.

They were standing under the wide-spreading branches of a huge oak tree.

These men were roughly dressed, rough-looking fellows, armed with rifles and pistols.

In their midst stood a young man of perhaps twenty years.

He was a handsome, bronzed-faced fellow, with keen blue eyes, firm chin and jaws, and a fearless air.

This young man was Dick Slater, a patriot—for the scene of our story was midsummer of the year 1780—and he had earned for himself the title of "The Champion Spy of the Revolution."

The young man was in the South, with his company of "Liberty Boys," trying to assist the patriots to fight against the redcoats and Tories, and having become separated from his comrades, had been waylaid by this band of Tories, who had made him a prisoner, and after trying to get him to tell who he was and what his business was in that part of the country, had placed a rope around his neck, thrown the other end over the limb above his head, and were standing there, waiting for the word from their leader to pull the youth up in the air.

It was then that the leader had uttered the words with which our story begins:

"Well, young man, if you have anything to say, say it now, for your time has come."

"I have nothing to say," was the calm reply.

"You are a fool."

"Thank you. You are a scoundrel!"

A hoarse growl escaped the man's lips.

"Say, you are altogether too saucy!"

"You may think so, but I don't."

"Well, I do."

"It isn't being saucy to simply tell the truth, is it?"

"But that ain't the truth."

"What I said about you isn't the truth?"

"No."

"Yes, it is."

"It isn't."

"I can prove that it is."

"How?"

"Why, your actions have proved it."

"My actions?"

"Yes."

"I don't see how."

"It is simple enough. The way you have treated me proves that you are a scoundrel."

"Bah!"

"No one but a scoundrel would stop a man on the highway and make a prisoner of him and try to force him to tell all he knows, on peril of death if he refuses."

"And nobody but a fool would refuse to tell."

"I did tell."

"You didn't do anything of the kind."

"I did."

"You told me a cock-and-bull story about being on your way to visit some relatives over across the mountains, but I know better than to believe any such story."

"It is the truth."

"Bosh."

"I don't see why you should think this not true."

"Well, it stands to reason it isn't true."

"I don't see it that way. It is not an impossibility that I might have relatives over the mountains, is it?"

"Oh, no."

"Nor that I might be on my way to visit them?"

"No, it ain't an impossibility, but it is improbable."

"Why should it be?"

"Well, that's simple enough. Not many people are putting in their time visiting relatives these days."

"No, I suppose not. But that doesn't prove that I am not on my way to visit relatives."

"Well, it is proof enough to suit me. To tell the truth, you don't look like that kind of a fellow."

"You think not?"

"That is what I think. You look like a chap who has been fighting in the army—like a soldier, in fact."

"Oh, you think I look like a soldier?"

"Yes. It would not surprise me if you were a soldier, and a spy, at that."

"You are mistaken, sir."

"You are not a soldier?"

"No."

"Nor a spy, hey?"

"No."

"Bah! He's lyin' ter ye, cap!" growled one of the men. "Le's string 'im up, an' be done with et."

The speaker was a big, burly fellow, with a ferocious face and fierce air.

The youth turned his eyes on the speaker, and said, with such a scornful air and intonation that the other was made angry:

"You're a liar yourself, you big ruffian, and if my hands were loose I would choke some sense into that thick head of yours."

"Whut's thet? Ye'd choke me—me, Big Bill Benton? Say, young feller, ye make me larf, ye do, so," and the big man forced a laugh, but it was evident that he felt anything but mirthful. His face was red with anger, and his little, reddish-hued eyes were gleaming fiercely.

"Yes, I would choke you, and teach you better than to talk as you have just been talking."

"Bah, young feller, ye wouldn't be er mouthful fur me," the ruffian said sneeringly.

"Free my hands, and I will prove that I am a better man than you, and do it quickly, too."

The youth's wish was that he should delay the hanging, and thus make it more likely that something might occur to save him, but he did not expect that the Tories would do what he asked.

Big Bill was eager to get a chance at the saucy youth, however, and he said to the leader eagerly:

"Oh, say, cap, jes' let me hev'er chance at 'im, won't ye? I'd like ter show 'im er thing er two thet he don't know er have enny idee erbout."

The idea of an encounter between the two seemed to strike the other man favorably, for they looked at their

leader and nodded, as much as to say, "Yes, let them have it out between themselves."

"Oh, well, I don't care, Bill. But I don't see what the use of pounding him up, when we are going to hang him right away, anyhow."

"Wal, ye see, cap'n, et'll teach 'im er good lesson, a theer's er sayin', ye know, ez how et's never too late to l'arn."

"It may never be too late to learn, but in his case it's too late for his learning to do him any good."

"Et'll do me good ter knock ther young cuss's head fur he called me er liar, an' thet's sumthin' I don't stand frum nobuddy."

"Well, free the prisoner, one of you men, and the rest all stand in a circle, with pistols drawn, ready to shoot him if he tries to escape."

This was done, and Dick found himself standing in the circle made by the ruffians, and at one side, facing him stood the giant ruffian, Big Bill.

He looked Dick over with a supercilious air, and then said, sneeringly:

"Say, young feller, ef ye'll take back whut ye said about me an' git down on yer knees an' ax my parding, I'll let ye off, and won't thump ye. Whut d'ye say?"

"Oh, you are afraid, are you?" remarked Dick coolly.

"Me afraid?" angrily. "Wal, I guess not. I wouldn't be er afraid uv er duzzen like ye."

"Then why are you trying to get out of this affair?"

"I hain't."

"I don't know what else you would call it."

"I wuz jes' givin' ye er chance ter git out uv et, bec' I took pity on ye, thet's all."

"Oh, thank you," sarcastically. "But I assure you I am in no need of pity."

"Oh, ye hain't, hey?"

"No, it is you who should be pitied."

"Me?—haw, haw, haw!" and the ruffian laughed loudly, his comrades joining him, for they thought such an idea ridiculous.

The youth kept a sober face, however, and said:

"Yes, you."

"Bosh! Why, I kin eat ye up, young feller!"

"You will find me pretty tough chewing."

"I guess not."

"I guess yes."

"Go for him, Bill, if you are going to," said the leader of the party. "I want to have this thing settled, and finish the affair by hanging the young fellow as quickly as possible."

Now, Dick's idea in picking the quarrel with the fellow as to delay the hanging in the hope that something might occur to make him a free man, and he made up his mind how to delay the affair as much as possible, by keeping out of the man's way, and thus lengthening the contest.

To this end, when Big Bill, at the leader's words, rushed upon Dick, showering blows at him, the youth retreated round the ring, avoiding the blows, and keeping out of the way.

He did this so successfully that the big fellow could not hit him at all, and it not take long to tire the ruffian to such an extent that he was forced to pause, and stand still, in order to rest and regain his wind.

He was panting heavily, and his face was red as a result of his unusual exertions.

"Say," he growled, "whut d'ye think this is, ennyhow?—er foot-race?"

"Well, you seem to be doing a good deal of running round," was the cool reply.

"Wal, w'y don' ye stan' still an' fight?"

The youth pretended to be surprised.

"You want me to stand still?" he asked.

"Uv course. Ye don' s'pose I wanten run myself ter death tryin' fur ter ketch ye, do ye?"

"Well, I'll tell you just the truth of the matter, Mr. Big Bill: you look so funny swinging your arms around that I enjoy keeping away and watching you."

"Oh, ye do, hey?"

"Yes. Say, you look like a Dutch windmill in action."

"Wal, ye'll think I'm er hooman caterpult ef on'y ye'll an' up an' fight me."

"Go ahead. I'll attend to my part of it, if you will attend to yours."

"All right. But, min' ye, no more foot-racin'."

Again the big fellow began the attack, and he flailed the atmosphere with his huge fists at a great rate, but failed to land a single blow. As before, Dick kept out of his way.

This angered him, and he paused to remonstrate. His hands felt as if they weighed a ton each, and he let them drop at his side. Just as he was opening his mouth to give utterance to his remonstrances out shot Dick's fist. Crack!

The youth's iron-like fist struck the giant fair between the eyes, and as he was not braced to withstand a blow he went down upon his back, kerthump.

To say that the fellow's comrades were amazed is putting it mildly.

They were almost paralyzed with astonishment.

They would never have believed that the youth, seem-

ingly a pigmy by the side of his opponent, would be able to knock the big fellow down. Yet he had done so. The giant lay sprawling, so the evidence was conclusive.

"Wal, thet beats me!"

"I wouldn' hev thort et!"

"Blamed ef he hain't knocked Bill down!"

"How in blazes did he do et?"

"Whut's ther matter with ye, Bill?"

"Git up, ye great, big, no-'count lummo!"

The blow had been a pretty hard one, and Big Bill had witnessed the greatest display of shooting stars of his life. He was slightly dazed, in fact, and lay there, blinking up at the sky, like a toad listening for thunder.

Dick stood there, cool and calm, his arms folded, and a smile on his face as he looked down upon the fallen man.

Presently the giant rose slowly to a sitting posture and looked around him in rather an uncertain manner.

"Whut's ther matter?" he asked huskily. "Did er mule kick me, er a tree fall on me, er wuz I struck by er bolt uv lightnin'?"

Dick held out his right fist.

"That is what struck you," he said, quietly.

The ruffian blinked at the fist and looked dubious.

"Say, et kain't be posserble," he gasped.

"Oh, yes, it is possible. Indeed, it is the exact truth."

"But ye couldn' posserbly hit like thet, young feller. W'y, my head aches like ez ef I hed bumped et erg'inster wall."

"It will ache much worse by the time I have hit you another crack or two like that," was the calm reply.

"Bah! ye kain't hit me thet erway erg'in."

"I'll show you, if you'll kindly get up and give me the chance."

"Oh, I'll git up, never ye fear. I'll git up, an' when I do ye wanten look out."

The youth laughed.

"I think it is you who will need to look out."

"I don' think so. Thet wuz an axident."

"You think it was an accident, do you?"

"Yas."

"Well, I will prove to you that you are mistaken by hitting you again, and harder than before."

The giant had scrambled to his feet by this time, and he felt of his forehead somewhat gingerly.

"Blazes, but et's swellin'," he growled.

"Yes. Those handsome eyes of yours will soon be swollen shut, Mr. Big Bill," said Dick quietly. "After I get through with you your friends will have to lead you around."

You will look like a man who had been having too close acquaintance with a swarm of angry bees."

"Bah! yer jes' er blowin'; thet's whut yer doin'," the ruffian howled, "an' I'm goin' ter knock ther head cl'ar offen ye."

With these words he rushed at Dick with all the fierceness of a mad bull.

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

The ruffian was so big and strong that Dick did not dare try to withstand his rush.

The youth's only way of doing was to retreat, temporarily, and he did this, keeping out of reach of the flailing fists, and as before it took but a short time to tire the man out. The exertion of striking at the atmosphere was more tiring than if he had hit something.

Presently he paused and dropped his hands, and started to say something.

He did not say it, however.

What he was about to say might have been a golden nugget of wisdom, but if so it was lost to the world.

The youth had been waiting for this moment, and his fist shot out just as the giant's mouth was opening.

Crack!

Again the iron-like fist struck the big Tory between the eyes, and again he went down as if hit by a sledge-hammer wielded by a strong man.

Again exclamations of amazement and wonder escaped the lips of the Tories.

"Thet wuz er sockdolager!"

"Ye bet et wuz!"

"I guess Bill'll think he hez been kicked by er hull team uv mules this time!"

"Say, ther youngster is er bad wun, hain't he!"

"I wouldn't want 'im ter hit me!"

The giant was rendered almost unconscious by the blow and shock of the fall, and lay there silent and motionless for a few moments.

Then he got his scattered wits together, and slowly rose to a sitting posture.

He was watched with interest by his comrades, who were eager to hear what he would have to say for himself.

Big Bill did not say anything at first, but rubbed his head, blinked his eyes, and stared around him in a wondering manner.

Then his eyes fell upon Dick, and this brought it all back to him.

"Say," he said, thickly, "did ye hit me erg'in?"

The youth nodded and smiled.

"I believe I did," he replied.

The ruffian nodded.

"I reckon so," he agreed. "I don't see no clouds, so couldn't hev be'n lightnin' thet struck me—an' ef et be'n, I'd hev be'n dead, inst'id uv only ha'f dead."

"Oh, he hit ye, all right, Bill."

"Yas, et wuzn't lightnin'."

"Nur ther kick uv er mule."

"No, an' nobuddy hit ye with an ax."

"Et wuz jes' ther young feller's fist whut done et, Bi."

Such were a few of the remarks made by the Tory's comrades, who really seemed pleased to see their comrade handled so roughly.

The truth was that he had lorded it over them on account of his size and strength. He was a bully by nature, and had made himself disliked. The others hoped this thrashing by the young stranger would take some of the bullying ideas out of him.

Big Bill paid no attention to the remarks of his friends but addressed Dick.

"Say," he remarked, slowly and hesitatingly, "if I up will ye hit me erg'in?"

"Of course I will," replied Dick briskly, brandishing his fist in a suggestive manner. "That is just what I will. I am aching to get another lick at you."

"An' I'm achin' becous ye've alreddy hed two licks at me with a grimace. "Say, ef thet's whut ye intend doin' guess ez how I won't get up. I'll jes' set heer an' save myself ther trubble uv havin' ter sot down erg'in with so turrible force."

"Oh, say, you haven't got enough already, have you?" claimed Dick, in pretended disappointment and surprise.

"Ye bet I hev!"

"Oh, come, you haven't been thumped any to speak of yet."

"Say," growled the giant, "I guess I'm ther wun who hez ther knowledge regardin' thet theer matter. An' I m say thet et seems ter me ez ef I've be'n thumped good plenty."

"But that's a mistake. I haven't got started yet."

"Oh, ye hedn't got started yit, hey?"

"No; I haven't even got warmed to my work yet."

"Then ye bet I'll stay right whur I am," determinedly "Ef ye hedn't got warmed up yit, I wouldn't wanter hev

aythin' ter do with ye arter ye hev got in thet condition, ye bet."

"Oh, say, Bill, ye've weakened."

"Ye hain't got no sand, ertall."

"Ye've be'n playin' et onter us fellers, Bill, makin' us think ye wuzn't afeerd uv noboddy, but heer ye air knucklin' ter er young feller whut hain't ha'f ez big ez ye air."

"Yer er coward, arter all, Bill Benton."

"Say, ef enny uv ye fellers want ter, ye kin go in an' tackle ther young feller," growled Bill, "but ez fur me, I don't want enny more uv et in mine, thank ye. I hain't er hog. I know when I've got ernuff."

"Yer er coward, Bill."

"I kin lick ther galoot ez sez so," howled the giant, smacking his fist in his hand with the report like that of a musket-shot.

"That will do," said the leader, who had been a silent, but interested witness of the encounter. "If you are not willing to continue the fight with the young fellow, that settles it, Bill."

"Wal, I hain't willin'. I've hed ernuff, an' I hain't backward erbout sayin' so, Jes' grab ther young cuss, so he kain't hit me er clip, an' I'll git up."

The young "Liberty Boy" felt that he had delayed the hanging as long as it was possible, and realized that unless he did something, and at once, he would end his life here on this South Carolina mountain-side.

There seemed to be nothing he could do, however. He was surrounded by a dozen fierce men, each with a cocked pistol in his hand, and to attempt to break through the circle and escape would be equivalent to committing suicide.

Suddenly, just as the leader of the band was about to give the command to seize the youth, Dick leaped into the air, caught hold of the limb above his head, and pulled himself up into the tree.

Several of the Tories leaped forward and grabbed at him as he did this, but failed to get hold of him.

"Don't fire," cried the leader sharply. "He can't escape us."

The men realized this, and thrust the pistols in their belts.

"Come down out of the tree," ordered the leader.

"Oh, no," replied Dick.

"You are foolish."

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"Why so?"

"For climbing into the tree."

"I don't think I'm foolish for doing so."

"I do. You can't escape."

"Well, I can delay the hanging, and that is something."

"Not much. You will hang, just the same."

"But every minute of delay is worth something to me. Life is sweet."

"Come down, young fellow."

"Oh, no; I could not think of doing so."

"Come down, or I'll send a man up to bring you down."

"Send him along. I'll wager that he will go down faster than he comes up."

"Bah! What would you do?"

"I'll kick him out of the tree."

"He'll do et, too, ye bet," growled Big Bill. "Ye needn' ax me ter climb up theer arter 'im, fur I won't go."

"Well, there are others besides yourself, Bill."

"I'm glad uv et. They kin hev all ther glory theer is ter be hed by tacklin' thet young cuss."

"He certainly took all the starch out of you."

"Thet's right. I hain't denyin' et—an' he'll take et out uv enny feller whut goes up inter thet tree arter 'im, too."

"Bosh! Jim, you and Tom go up in the tree and bring the young scoundrel down."

The two men addressed stepped forward, and began climbing the tree. They were not such expert climbers as was Dick, and then, too, they did not have such an incentive as he had to urge them to rapid work.

If the look on their faces was anything to go by they were not over well pleased with the task which they had been set to accomplish.

They had seen a specimen of Dick's handiwork when he knocked Big Bill around, and they could not help reflecting that if the youth was half so handy with his feet as with his hands, he would be able to make good his boast of sending them down faster than they came up.

The foliage on the tree was so thick that it was almost impossible to see Dick up in the tree. In fact, the men below were not sure that they could see the youth at all.

Slowly the two men worked their way up, and presently they reached the first limbs. It would now be easier to make their way upward, but they did not make haste even then.

They paused and looked upward.

They met with a surprise. Nowhere could they see the young man they had been sent to bring down.

They peered upward, straining their eyes.

Still without success.

"Say, whur is ther cuss, ennyway?" asked one.

"I dunno. I kain't see 'im."

"Neether kin I."

"But he's thar, somewhars, uv course."

"Yas, uv course."

"Le's climb up higher; then we'll see 'im."

They made their way upward, until they were halfway to the top, and then paused again.

They were surprised to find that even now they could not see the young man.

Yet they were now so well up in the tree that they could see to the top, and they could not understand how the youth could manage to conceal himself so as not to be visible.

"Wal, whur in blazes is ther feller, ennyhow?" growled one.

"Blamed ef I know. Looks ez ef he hed took wings an' gone erway like er bird."

"I don' see 'im ennywhurs, but he mus' be in ther tree. He couldn' hev got erway."

"Mebby he jumped over ther bluff."

The tree stood right on the edge of quite a high bluff, or precipice.

"No; ef he hed jumped we'd hev seen er heerd 'im ez he went crashin' through ther limbs; an' et'd be shore death ter make ther jump, ennyway, an' I don' think he'd do et."

"Whar ther dickens air ye, ennyhow?" called out the other, raising his voice.

There was no reply.

"Oh, say, show yerself," growled the other. "We're boun' ter take ye down, ennyhow, so whut's ther use uv tryin' enny tricks?"

Still there was no reply, but the leader called up from below:

"What's the matter?"

"We don' see ther cuss nowhars," was the reply.

"What's that?—you don't see him?"

"No; an' I don' berleeve he's in ther tree ertall."

"Bosh! He can't help being in the tree. The foliage is so thick you can't see him, that's all. Climb up higher. You'll run onto him, then."

The two obeyed the order, and climbed higher, but still they could see nothing of the youth whom they had climbed up there to find, and one called down:

"He hain't heer, cap'n!"

"Bosh! I tell you he must be there," was the reply.

But he hain't."

"Fools. He can't help being. Look around, and you will see him."

The two looked searchingly around, at the limbs above

and below them, and became satisfied that the youth was not in the tree.

"Ye kin say whut ye pleeze, cap'n," called out one. "Thet young cuss hain't in ther tree. He's gone."

CHAPTER III.

HOW DICK ESCAPED.

Where was Dick?

What had become of him?

The two ruffians were right. He was not in the tree.

He had made his escape, and in a very peculiar manner.

The tree was a very large one, and the body, even well up toward the top of the tree, was two feet in diameter, and when Dick had climbed up nearly to the top he met with a surprise.

In one side of the body of the tree was a hole at least a foot and a half in diameter.

The youth stuck his head through the hole and peered downward.

Far below he saw the glimmer of light, which proved that the tree was hollow, and that there was an opening into the open air at the bottom.

He wondered if the opening within the tree was large enough to permit the passage of his body.

He could not tell without trying, so he made up his mind to try it at once.

If he remained where he was he would be recaptured, and that would mean death by hanging.

Nothing could be worse than that, so he did not hesitate to enter the tree-trunk through the opening in its side.

There was some difficulty connected with this, but he succeeded in getting through, and then, holding to the rim of the opening, he felt around with his feet, until he found some protuberances on which to rest them.

Then he let go his hold and began figuring on making his way down.

He decided that the opening down through the trunk of the tree was about eighteen inches in diameter, and if it did not widen out and become larger farther down he would be able to make his way down in safety by pressing his arms and knees against the walls, thus converting the limbs into brakes.

He realized that the Tories would send men up in the tree to make him come down, and they would inevitably

discover the hole in the side of the trunk, and would understand how he had made his escape.

"And I must get clear down through, and out of here before they do that, or they will fire down in here with their pistols," he told himself, and if they were to do this, they would likely kill him, as they could hardly miss him if they were to try.

So he made his way downward as rapidly as possible, and at last, after what seemed like an hour to him—but which had been only a few minutes in reality—he came to the place where the opening ended.

A glance showed Dick below him was the sloping side of the bluff on which the tree stood. All around him were the long, gnarled roots of the tree, many of them sticking straight out over the chasm.

It was a steep descent, but Dick felt sure he could get down it in safety.

He was ready and willing to make the attempt, at any rate.

Any chance was welcome when the alternative was to be hanged till he was dead.

Seizing hold of one of the larger roots, Dick swung himself down and hung suspended.

If he dropped straight downward from where he hung it would be a drop of twenty to thirty feet, and then he would likely be overbalanced and go rolling downward to the bottom of the ravine a distance of three or four hundred feet.

Ten feet below, however, and five or six feet to one side, was a ledge three or four feet wide. If he could manage to leap down and land on that he would be all right.

He began swinging himself back and forth like the pendulum of some huge clock, and when at last he had acquired what he considered to be sufficient momentum, he let go his hold of the root and went flying through the air.

He succeeded in his attempt. He alighted on the ledge, and managed to retain his place there.

He heard the voices of the two Tories as they made their way up into the tree, and crouched there, waiting till they disappeared from sight amidst the foliage.

Had either of the two looked downward as they were climbing up they would have seen him.

But they did not look down.

They supposed that their game was in the tree above their heads, and they kept their gaze turned upward.

Dick did not wait long. He realized that the discovery of his escape would soon be made, also the manner of his escape, and it behooved him to be as far away as possible when that occurred.

He stepped over the side of the ledge and made his way down the side of the bluff as slowly and carefully as possible.

He found it difficult to go slowly, however.

The side was very steep, and he found that in spite of all he could do he got to going faster and faster.

With every step his speed and momentum increased.

He exerted himself to the utmost, and restricted his speed all he possibly could, but by the time he was halfway down the side of the bluff, he was going almost at running speed.

He remembered that he had seen many rocks and boulders at the bottom of the ravine, and realized that to fall and go rolling to the bottom might result in severe injury or even death.

He gritted his teeth, kept his head, and continued down the steep way at almost racehorse speed.

His coolness and splendid eyesight made it possible for him to remain in an erect position till he was within fifty feet of the bottom, and then he missed his footing and fell.

He threw himself backward, and plunged downward feet foremost, but he went at great speed.

When within twenty-five feet of the bottom his feet struck against a stone, and he was hurled head over heels clear to the bottom of the ravine.

Luckily, he did not strike a rock or boulder when he alighted.

Had he done so it would have been all up with him.

As it was, he was knocked almost senseless.

He was dazed for a few minutes, and lay where he had fallen, unable to move.

Presently he regained the use of his faculties, and then he rose slowly to a sitting position.

He looked upward toward the tree in which he had so recently been perched.

It seemed a long ways off, away up there on the rim of the ravine.

He could see no one, either in the tree or on the ground underneath.

"They are there, though," he told himself. "I wonder if they have discovered my escape yet?"

At this instant he heard the sound of yelling, which came down faintly to his ears.

"Yes, they have discovered that I have escaped," he said to himself, "and they will soon discover how I escaped, if they have not already done so, and the best thing I can do is to be getting away from here."

The youth leaped to his feet, and without stopping to

brush the dirt off his clothes, made his way up the ravine at a rapid walk.

He could still hear the sound of the yelling, and had no doubt that his enemies would soon be on his trail.

"I will hunt for a place where the ravine-side is not so steep, and make my way to the top," the youth said to himself. "Jove, I wish that I could get my horse out of the hands of those scoundrels. I believe I will make the attempt, at any rate. I will go back, and spy on them, and follow them. I'll stick on their trail till I run them to their rendezvous, and then I'll manage in some way to get my horse back again."

Presently he came to a place where the side of the ravine was not so steep, and indeed not so high, and he climbed up to the top, and made his way in the direction that would take him to the spot where the Tories were.

* * * * *

When Jim and Tom called down that the youth was not in the tree, that he had disappeared, the leader of the band of Tories did not know what to think.

"You must be mistaken," he declared. "Why, he could not possibly escape from the tree."

"But he hez," was the dogged reply.

"Impossible! He did not have wings, and could not fly, and that is the only way he could have got out of the tree."

"Wal, he hain't heer, 'tenny rate," was the reply. "Jes' how he got erway is more'n I kin say, but he hez done et, ye bet."

"Bosh! Beat around, among the foliage. You'll find him."

"We hev done thet, an' he hain't nowhurs ter be foun'."

"Keep on searching. Climb up higher. You'll find him."

"All right, cap'n; jes' ez ye say, but we know he hain't heer."

Presently a loud yell of amazement was given utterance to by one of the men in the tree.

"Great Guns!" he howled. "I've foun' out how ther cuss got erway. I've diskivered whur he went."

"Well, where?" called up the captain. "How did he manage to get away?"

"Ther tree's holler!"

"What!" in amazement.

"Ther tree's holler, an' he hez crawled down through et, an' got cl'ar erway."

"Then he must have gone down the side of the ravine," the leader cried, and he ran to the edge of the bluff and looked down.

He saw nothing of Dick, as the youth had disappeared up the ravine two or three minutes before, but he saw tracks in the soft earth of which the ravine-side consisted.

"Yes, it's a fact. That is what he has done," he cried. "The scoundrelly rebel has been too smart for us, and has made his escape, while we stood here, gaping up in the tree. It beats anything I ever heard of," and then he gave vent to his feelings in a volley of curses.

"Why not follow him?" suggested one man.

"Follow him?"

"Yes."

"Bah! A fellow who can climb a tree and disappear as if by magic, as he did, could not be caught. We may as well give it up as hopeless. He has made his escape, and that is all there is to it."

"Wal, we've got his hoss," said another.

"Yes, that's something."

"Ye bet. He's ruther er good-lookin' hoss ef I know ennythin' erbout it."

"You are right; he is a fine horse, and I'll ride him to the cabin."

Then he lifted up his voice and called out:

"Comin' down, Jim and Tom?"

"Yas, we're comin'," was the reply, and a few moments later the two dropped to the ground, panting as a result of the unusual exertion.

"Say, wuzn't thet er slick trick ther cuss played onter us, hey?" exclaimed the one called Jim.

"Purty slick," replied another.

"D'ye s'pose he knowed ther tree wuz holler?" asked Tom.

"Ye mean afore he clum up inter et?"

"Yas."

"I dunno, but et would look ez ef sech mought be ther case."

"Well," said the leader, thoughtfully, "if he knew the tree was hollow, that would prove that he must be pretty familiar with things in these parts, for we did not know it, and we have lived around here for years."

"An' he sed he wuz er stranger in these parts, cap'n."

"I know he did, but that proves nothing. I am beginning to think he is a dangerous fellow, and that he has likely been in this part of the country for a long time."

"But whut would he be doin' heer, cap'n?"

"Spying."

"Spyin'?"

"Yes."

"Who on?"

"Why not us?"

Exclamations escaped the lips of the men.

"Say, d'ye s'pose thet he hez be'n reelly spyin' enter us, cap'n?" said one.

"It would not surprise me if such were the case."

"But w'y would he be doin' et?"

"That is plain enough. We have been carrying things with rather a high hand, have we not?"

"Wal, we've be'n doin' jes' erbout whutever we wanted ter, thet's er fack."

"Exactly. And the probabilities are that some of the patriots of the neighborhood have sent for some one to spy on us, and discover our hiding-place, when a party would be organized and we would be exterminated."

"Say, d'ye reelly think thet is ther skeem, cap'n?"

"I am inclined to think so."

"Then et stan's us in hand ter ketch ther cuss an' shoot 'im full uv holes."

"You are right. We would have done a mighty good thing for ourselves, I'm thinking, if we had pulled him up when we had the rope around his neck."

"Ef Big Bill hed kep' his big mouth shet, we'd hev done et," growled one.

"Say, ye don' wanter go ter torkin' too sassy, Jim Peters," growled Big Bill, "I won' stan' et, ye bet!"

"Thet's right," said another. "Ther bes' thing ye kin do is ter keep still, Bill."

The big fellow glanced from one to another of his comrades, and he saw by the look on their faces that they were against him. He realized that his day of bullying them was past, and with a hoarse growl of rage and disgust, he subsided. He feared that if he got into a fight with one the others would jump on him.

"Stop quarreling, and come along with me," ordered the leader, and he untied Dick's horse and mounting, rode slowly up the road, the men following on foot.

And behind them, at a safe distance, was Dick Slater, a grim look of determination on his face.

"I'll have my horse back if I have to follow them over into Georgia," he said to himself determinedly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEMON DOZEN.

The Tories had followed the road a distance of three quarters of a mile when they came to a log-house which stood a short distance back from the road.

The way had been rather a steep incline upward, the entire distance, and this settler's cabin stood not far from the summit of the mountain, which was one of the highest in this part of the country.

When the Tories came to the cabin they stopped, and the leader dismounted and tied the horse. Then the entire party advanced, and when they reached the house were met at the door by a girl of perhaps seventeen years.

"Is your father at home, Miss Jessie?" asked the leader. The girl shook her head.

"No, he is away, Mr. Marks," was the reply.

"Where is he?"

The girl hesitated, and this hesitation was noted by the sharp eyes of Raymond Marks.

"He has gone to Augusta," was the reply, after the brief hesitation.

"To Augusta, you say?"

"Yes."

"When did he go?"

"This morning."

"When will he be back?"

A sudden light, seemingly of anger, flashed into the girl's eyes, but if she was angry because of being questioned so closely she did not show it in her tones when she answered:

"He took a load of provisions to Augusta, to sell to the British."

"Oh, he did?"

The man's tone was almost sneering. It seemed that he did not believe the girl's statement.

"He did!" decidedly.

"He may have taken some produce to town with him, but he went for another purpose," said Marks positively.

"What other purpose could he have gone for?" the girl asked, with a good assumption of surprise.

"You know as well as I do."

"I do not. I have no idea what you mean."

"It may be impolite to say so, Miss Jessie, but really I must say that I doubt your statement. I am confident that your father went to Augusta on other business than the selling of vegetables and produce, and I am equally certain that you know what the business is."

"I assure you that you are mistaken. I do not think my father had any other business in Augusta, and if he did I do not know what it was."

"Oh, well, we won't argue the point. You are here all alone, I suppose?"

"I am."

The leader of the Tories shook his head in mock displeasure.

"That is bad," he said. "It is unsafe for a young girl like yourself to stay over night alone in this wild region, and in these times when the country is overrun with desperadoes of various kinds. I should have thought that your father would have known better than to leave you here alone."

"I am not at all afraid, Mr. Marks," was the quiet reply, "and I think that my father is quite capable of running his own affairs without any help from outsiders."

"Oh, you do?" in a sneering tone.

"Yes, I do," was the spirited reply.

"Well, you may think so, but I don't. I think it very foolish of your father to go away and leave you in this fashion, and I really feel it to be my duty to remain and protect you until he returns."

The girl's eyes flashed as she replied:

"You need not trouble yourself. I am not afraid, and I am amply able to take care of myself."

"You may think so, but I don't. And we will camp right down here and stay till your father comes back. I wish to learn from him what success he had in his spy-work in Augusta, anyway, so will be pleasing myself by staying, as well as giving you protection."

"My father has not gone to Augusta to do spy-work," said the girl.

"You think not?" in a mocking tone.

"I know it."

"Well, I make due allowances for filial love on your part, and so will not criticise your statement. Of course, it is only natural you should deny that he went there for that purpose."

Then Raymond Marks turned to his men and said:

"We will stop here till Jim Burton gets back from Augusta, so you may as well make yourselves at home."

"All right, cap'n," said one, and the others nodded in a satisfied way. It was evident that they were pleased with the prospect of remaining at the settler's home.

"But, sir, I have not asked you to stay," said the girl.

"That does not make any difference, Miss Jessie," was the cool reply; "we do not need to be asked. We will stay without being asked."

"You will not stay with my consent."

"Then we will stay without it, my dear girl."

The girl's face flushed, and an angry light glowed in her eyes as she said:

"I am not your 'dear girl,' Raymond Marks, and I would thank you to not address me in that manner."

"Oh, come, Jessie, don't get angry, that's a good girl," the ruffian said. "You know how much I think of you, and you should be pleased to have me address you in that fashion."

"It doesn't matter how much you care for me, you know very well that I care nothing for you, Raymond Marks."

"I know you have told me so a few times," was the cool reply, "but I don't think you meant it."

"Yes, I did mean it. I not only do not care for you, but I dislike you."

"Indeed?" in a sneering tone, but with an angry glint in his eyes.

"Yes, indeed. And if you had any manhood about you, you would not push your company, and that of your men upon me in the manner you are trying to do."

"Bah! I have had quite enough talk from you, Jessie Burton! We are going to stay, whether you like it or not, so you might just as well make up your mind to it, and not waste any more breath talking against it. I am confident that your father is a rebel, and that he has gone to Augusta to spy on the British in the interests of the rebels in these parts, and I am going to stay here till he gets back home. Then I am going to——"

The villain paused and looked at the girl with a wolfish expression that caused her to shrink back, and exclaim:

"Then you are going to——what?"

"Then I am going to ask you once more, and for the last time, to become my wife; and if you refuse, then I will——"

Again he paused and glared at the girl in such a menacing manner that she gasped out.

"What will you do?"

"I will hang your father to that tree—hang him till he is dead!"

There was no mistaking the fact that the scoundrel meant what he said.

The tone and air with which he delivered the statement proved this.

The girl realized it, also, and her previous knowledge of the man's nature was further evidence that he was making no idle threat.

"Oh, you—scoundrel!" the girl cried.

"Girl, beware how you anger me," Marks cried. "Have a care!"

"What would you do, you coward?" was the defiant reply.

"I might take it into my head to hang you before your father gets back."

"I do not fear you, Raymond Marks."

"That may be. You are, as I happen to know, brave enough. Indeed, that is one thing that makes me love you intensely, and——"

"What," interrupted the girl, scornfully, "a villain like you love? You don't know the meaning of the word."

"By the eternals you will do well to put a bridle on that sharp tongue of yours, girl!" Marks cried, taking a step forward, the look of a demon in his eyes.

"That's right, strike me!" cried the girl, scathingly and fearlessly. "It will be just what might be expected of you."

"Keep on," said Marks hoarsely, his face red with anger. "Just keep on, and you will crowd me over the line, and then—look out!"

"Yes, and you may crowd me over the line," was the prompt reply, "in which case it will be well for you to look out."

As she spoke the girl drew a pistol from a pocket in the dress, and held it up with a meaning gesture.

"Bah," sneered Marks, "you would not dare shoot that thing off."

"Would I not? You will find out if you attempt to lay hand on me, Raymond Marks."

"Bosh! I have no intention of laying a hand on you. Put the pistol away before it goes off and hurts you."

"You need have no fears on that score," quietly. "I know how to handle the weapon. I have practised shooting a great deal, and can hit a mark the size of your hand at a distance of a hundred feet."

"The deuce you can," exclaimed Marks, while the other officers looked at one another somewhat dubiously. The same thought was in the mind of each—that he would not wish the girl to try her hand shooting at him.

"Yes, 'the deuce I can,'" the girl said, "and you will do well to bear the fact in mind. It may save your worthless life."

"Say, don't talk quite so saucy, Miss Jessie," protested the ruffian. "I don't like it."

"I don't care if you don't."

"You will care when your father comes home, and I proceed to revenge myself upon him for the insults you have put upon me."

"If you injure my father I will shoot you dead, Raymond Marks, even if it is the last thing I do on earth."

"Bah! I have no fear of anything of the kind, Miss Jessie."

"Say, cap'n, look yonder," suddenly cried one of the men, pointing up the road, "who'n blazes air them fellers?"

The captain whirled and looked in the direction indicated.

He saw a party consisting of seemingly a hundred horsemen coming down the road toward the house.

They were not more than two hundred yards distant, and were riding at a gallop, so would be at hand very quickly.

"They may be rebels," cried Marks, in excitement. "We had better get away from here, men, and not let them get a chance to capture us."

The men did not hesitate, but bounded around the house, climbed the slope back of the building, and disappeared over the summit just as the horsemen came to a stop in front of the house.

"Good," murmured the girl, with an air of satisfaction. "I don't know who these strangers are, or whether or not they are friends, but at least they cannot be more dangerous than Raymond Marks and his gang of desperadoes."

One of the horsemen leaped to the ground, and advancing to where the girl stood, doffed his hat, and bowing, said pleasantly:

"Good afternoon, miss. Do you live here?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply. Jessie had surveyed the youth quickly and searchingly, and had decided that one with such a handsome, manly face could not be bad.

"And those men who fled as we approached—do you mind telling me who they are?"

"I have no objections to telling you, sir. They are the band of Tories known in these parts as the 'Demon Dozen.'"

"Ha! the Demon-Dozen, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"And they are Tories?"

"They are."

"And you? Surely you are not a Tory, miss?"

"No, sir. I am proud to say that I am a patriot."

The girl threw her head back and looked so proud and beautiful that an involuntary exclamation of admiration escaped the young man's lips.

"Bravo!" he cried. "I am glad to know that you are a patriot, miss, for myself and men are patriots"

"And I am glad to know that you are patriots, sir, for those scoundrels who just fled at your approach were threatening me, and were going to stay here till to-morrow, and hang my father when he gets home from Augusta."

"Well, they certainly deserve the title of Demon Dozen," said the young man. "But, miss, can you tell me where the young man is who was riding that horse that was hitched out there when we rode up?"

There was an anxious look on the youth's face, and an anxious tone to the voice, and the girl noticed it.

"No young man rode the horse, sir," she replied. "It was ridden by the leader of the Demon Dozen, a man by the name of Raymond Marks."

"What is that you say?" the youth exclaimed. "Then my friend, who was the owner of that horse, has likely been murdered by those scoundrels!"

"If that horse belonged to a friend of yours, it is likely that he has been put out of the way," said the girl.

An exclamation escaped the youth's lips.

"If those scoundrels have killed my friend I will never rest until I have put every one of them to death," he declared, with fierce earnestness, and the girl knew he meant it.

At this moment there came a cry from the horsemen out at the gate:

"Here he is, Bob. Here comes Dick!"

The youth looked up the road, and saw a man approaching on foot, and a cry of delight escaped his lips.

"Yes, it's him, sure enough!" he exclaimed. "That is Dick."

CHAPTER V.

A FIENDISH SCHEME.

As the reader has already guessed, the newcomers were the famous "Liberty Boys," and the youth who had been talking to the girl was Bob Estabrook, Dick Slater's right-hand man.

He was always left in charge of the "Liberty Boys" in Dick's absences.

Bob hastened out to the gate, reaching there just as Dick did.

"How happens it that you come here afoot, and that some other fellow rode your horse to this place, Dick?" Bob asked.

"I was captured, Bob."

"Captured?"

"Yes, and almost hanged."

"Who by?"

"A gang of Tories, a dozen in number."

"The gang that fled from here as we approached, I suppose."

"Quite likely."

"It is called—so the girl yonder says—the Demon Dozen."

"So that's what they are known by, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, their actions justify them in having the name for they are demons."

"What did they do to you, Dick?"

The youth explained, the others listening with interest.

"I'd like a chance at that gang," said Bob, when Dick had finished.

"And I!"

"Here, too!"

"The same here!"

Such were a few of the exclamations, and it was evident that if the "Liberty Boys" were to get a chance at the Demon Dozen, the scoundrels who made up the gang would not stand much chance for their lives.

"I wonder what the villains were doing here?" remarked Dick.

"The girl says they were threatening that they would stay here till her father returned from Augusta to-morrow, and then hang him," said Bob.

"He must be a patriot, then."

"Yes, she said that he is a patriot."

"Then we had better camp down in this vicinity and remain and see to it that the Demon Dozen does not get its threat into execution."

"That is a good plan."

"I'll go and have a little talk with the girl, fellows," said Dick. "Then I will tell you what to do."

"All right."

The youth walked to the house, and bowed to the girl in a courteous manner.

"Your name is Miss Jessie Burton, I believe?" he remarked.

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"My friend tells me that you are a patriot, and that those scoundrels who were here threatened that they would remain till your father came home, and then hang him."

"Yes, sir. That is what Raymond Marks said would be done, unless——" She paused, and hesitated.

"Unless what, Miss Burton?"

"Unless I agreed to become his wife."

"Ah, ha, that's it, eh?" exclaimed Dick.

"Yes, sir," with a blush.

"Well, how about it? Do you care for the fellow sufficiently so that you would be willing to marry him?"

The girl shook her head.

"No, indeed," she answered promptly and decidedly. "I could never marry him. I would die first. I hate him, sir!"

"So I guessed," with a smile. "Surely a beautiful, hon-
 o'king girl like you could not care for a villain like
 me you speak of."

No, no! I detest, loathe him."

Then, if they were not interfered with, they would
 ably put their threat into execution and hang your
 der, miss?"

I fear so, sir."

Very well. Then we will have to make it our business
 see to it that they are interfered with."

Oh, sir, if you only would," the girl exclaimed, her
 lighting up.

We will do so, miss."

But will it not be a great inconvenience to you, sir?"

Not at all."

But surely it will be. You are traveling, and it will
 se you to lose a lot of valuable time."

We are not so particularly traveling, miss. We are
 riot soldiers, and are down here for the purpose of ren-
 ing all possible assistance to the patriots."

Ah, your men are patriot soldiers?"

Yes. You may have heard of us. We are known as
 the Liberty Boys of '76."

The girl started, and an excited look appeared on her

I have heard father speak of you many times!" she

ad.

I thought perhaps you had heard of us."

Yes; and you—can it be possible that you are Dick
 ter, the young man who has made such a wonderful
 utation as a scout and spy?"

I am Dick Slater, miss, and am captain of the 'Liberty
 s,' but I don't know about the rest of it," with a smile.

Oh, I am glad to know that I have met you, Mr. Sla-
 ter," the girl exclaimed; "and father will be delighted to

low that such wonderful fighters are in this vicinity, for
 Tories have been carrying things with a high hand, and
 will be pleased to think that a stop may be put to it."

Well, we will go into camp not far from here, and will
 ain till your father gets home, and then if the Demon
 zen makes an attempt to injure him we will exterminate
 gang."

Why not stay here at the house, sir?"

It would not hold all the men, miss, and then, by mov-
 on a short distance the Tories may be deceived into
 aking we are not going to stay in the vicinity."

The girl looked a bit disappointed.

But I am afraid the Demon Dozen may come to the
 se, and carry me away a prisoner," she said.

"I will have some of my men keep watch on the house,
 miss, and if the rascals put in an appearance I will know
 it at once, and will come to your rescue."

"Very well, sir."

"And now, Miss Jessie, have you any provisions that
 you can spare?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Good! We will be glad to buy them."

The girl shook her head.

"I cannot consent to take pay for provisions which you
 may need, sir."

"Oh, yes."

"No, indeed! You are patriots, and will be staying here
 for my benefit and that of my father, and I cannot accept
 pay. You are welcome to such provisions as we have with-
 out payment."

"You are very kind, Miss Jessie. We will accept the pro-
 visions, and then, when your father comes home, we will
 offer him payment."

"You may do so, if you like, but he will refuse to ac-
 cept."

The youth called a dozen of the youths to the house, and
 they proceeded to load themselves down with bags of corn
 meal, and with dried venison and salt pork. This they car-
 ried out and placed on the backs of their horses, and then
 Dick told the girl to not be alarmed, for a watch would be
 kept on the cabin, after which the "Liberty Boys" moved
 onward down the road.

A quarter of a mile distant they turned aside from the
 road and went into camp at the foot of a high bluff, which
 sloped upward a distance of three hundred feet at least.
 There were trees growing all about, and as there was plenty
 of dead limbs and underbrush for firewood, it was an ideal
 place for a camp.

It was now almost sundown, and after the horses had
 been picketed and fires had been built, sentinels were put
 out on all sides save the one on which was the bluff. They
 could not be approached from this side.

Four of the "Liberty Boys" were watching the settler's
 cabin, so it would be impossible for the members of the
 Tory gang to bother the girl without the fact becoming
 known to Dick Slater.

* * * * *

Raymond Marks and the members of his gang were an
 angry lot of men when they were forced to take refuge in
 flight at the approach of the "Liberty Boys."

They raced up the sloping hillside back of the house, and
 disappeared over the brow of the hill, but here they paused.

"Let's stay here and see what the strangers do," said Marks, and all came to a stop.

There were trees and rocks at the top of the hill, and the Tories took refuge behind these. From this vantage point they could see all that went on below without being seen.

"Who in blazes can the scoundrels be?" growled Marks, after he had taken a look at the horsemen.

"Dunno," replied one. "They look like bad chaps ter fool with, though, ter my way uv thinkin'."

"Hello! Look yonder, cap'n," said another. "Who's ther cuss comin' on foot?"

It was Dick, and when the Tories had gazed searchingly for a few moments, one exclaimed:

"Et's ther cuss we come so near ter hangin', an' whut slipped out uv our han's so slick, by gittin' down through ther holler tree."

"By Jove! you are right," Marks exclaimed. "It is he, sure enough."

"An' he acks like he knowed them other fellers, don't he?" from one of the men.

"He does, for a fact," agreed the leader, "and the chances are that he is a member of their party. I might have known one rebel would not be making his way through this country."

Bob had now gone out to the gate to meet Dick, and was engaged in conversation with him.

"Yer right, he's er member uv ther gang, ye kin bet," said another. "See 'im chinnin' with ther other feller?"

"Yes—and see, he is going to the house to talk to Jessie," this from Marks. "I'll wager that he is the leader of the gang."

"I shouldn' wonder an' ye air right, cap'n."

"An' I'll bet they air rebels," declared another.

The rest nodded their heads. All believed that this was the truth.

Not much more was said until after Dick had finished his conversation with the girl, and the dozen "Liberty Boys" had carried the provisions out and placed the bags on the backs of the horses. Then the leader said:

"Looks as if they were going to move on." There was a tone of satisfaction to his voice.

"Yas, et looks thet erway," was the reply of one of the men.

When the "Liberty Boys" rode away down the trail the Tories moved away in the same general direction, keeping on the top of the ridge, which was in reality the extreme summit of the mountain.

They were careful not to be seen, but by pausing occa-

sionally and hiding behind tree or rock, while making observation, they were enabled to keep track of the of horsemen.

And when the horsemen turned aside from the road, dismounted at the foot of the bluff, and began making preparations to go into camp, the members of the Dozen gang looked at one another inquiringly.

"Whut does thet mean?" asked one.

"Et's plain enuff, I think," said another. "Ther air goin' ter go inter camp fur ther night."

"That is what they are going to do," said Marks, the question is, will they go away in the morning?"

The men shook their heads. This question was too for them.

"I reckon ye'll hev ter wait till mornin' ter git an answer ter thet question, cap'n," said one.

The Tories were at the top of the bluff, and all directly above the "Liberty Boys," who were busy around, making preparations for spending the night comfortably.

All around the Tories lay huge stones, some of them being boulders of such size that it would have required united efforts of half a dozen men to move them.

While looking around him Raymond Marks' eyes upon these stones and boulders, and a sudden, fiendish came to him:

Why could not he and his men practically exterminate the party encamped below by rolling the stones and boulders down upon them?

It was a splendid idea, he thought, and a look of fiendish delight shone in his eyes.

He stepped close to the edge of the bluff, and shielded his body behind a boulder, looked down.

The side of the bluff sloped just enough so that stones and boulders would go bounding down the descent with ever-increasing speed and force, and would go bounding jumping and tearing through the encampment of the Liberty Boys below.

Being convinced that the plan was not only practicable but certain of success, Raymond Marks hastened to tell the men what he thought of doing.

They were delighted with the idea. They were convinced that the strangers were enemies, "rebels," as they called patriots, and were ready to wipe them out of existence without compunction.

"Et's ther very thing, cap'n!" declared one, enthusiastically. "Theer's plenty uv stuns an' boulders heer, an' ye kin take our time an' git er great lot uv 'em reddy at the edge uv ther bluff, an' then, when ther cusses down t-

"I got ter sleep, we kin push ther stuns an' boulders all at ther same time, an' smash ther hull gang."

"That is just what we can and will do," declared Marks.

"I will wait till after dark before beginning work, as you might see us if we commenced while it is yet light."

"Correct, cap'n; an' thet'll give us jes' time ter eat our rations."

"They retired to a safe distance and ate their suppers, and when the time they were through it was dark."

"Now get to work, boys," said Marks, a ring of diabolical in his tones. "Line up a lot of stones and boulders, and

"we will wait till the rebels are asleep, and turn the stones and boulders loose on them."

"An' make 'em wake up in ther other worl', hey, cap'n!"

"a heartless laugh."

"You are right."

"When the villains went to work, piling the rocks along the edge of the bluff, and many large boulders were rolled to

"the ridge, where a push from a man's arm would send them

"rolling down the side of the bluff."

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL.

"Jessie Burton ate her supper, and by the time she had finished the dishes and put them away it was dark."

"While she was thus engaged she had been thinking of Raymond Marks and his band, and the idea came to her

"that it might be a good idea to take a look around, and see if she could learn anything regarding them."

"She knew that Marks was a bold, shrewd fellow, and the thought came to her that he might manage to in some way

"to get damage upon the 'Liberty Boys.'"

"They went up to the top of the mountain," she said to herself, "and by following along the ridge they might easily

"have seen that the 'Liberty Boys' did not go far, but went to camp. That being the case, Marks might think of

"a plan for injuring the patriots. I am familiar with the ground, and think I will just go on a tour of investiga-

"tion."

"Jessie was a brave girl, and placing another pistol in a pocket in her dress, she left the house, and stole

"through the darkness."

"She made her way up the hillside, back of the house, and reaching the top, paused and listened."

"She heard nothing."

"Not a sound broke the stillness."

"They have gone on farther along the ridge," the girl said to herself.

"She moved slowly and cautiously forward."

"Her familiarity with the ground was of considerable value to her, for it enabled her to make her way along without making any noise to speak of."

"Slowly she moved forward, and after an interval of several minutes she heard sounds of voices and footsteps."

"She paused and listened."

"The voices were low and muffled, and she could not make out what was said."

"The footsteps, contrary to her expectations, did not come nearer."

"It is Raymond Marks and his gang, I am confident," thought Jessie. "But what are they doing?"

"She was sure they were up to some mischief, however."

"Her knowledge of their natures made her confident on this point."

"But what could they be doing?"

"She made up her mind that she must find out."

"To this end she began advancing."

"Slowly and cautiously she made her way forward."

"She realized that if she were to be discovered she would be made a prisoner."

"So she exercised every possible care."

"She was naturally light on her feet, and then, too, she was the daughter of a pioneer, and had hunted the wild animals of the mountains and forest, and had acquired the catlike step of the wild Indian."

"Closer and closer she crept, and presently she was near enough so that she could see the men's forms as they moved back and forth."

"It was fairly dark, but by crouching close to the earth, and getting the men's bodies outlined against the lighter sky, Jessie was enabled to make out what was going on."

"She soon made up her mind what it was that the men were doing."

"They are rolling stones and boulders close up to the edge of the bluff," she said to herself. "Now what are they doing that for?"

"It did not take her long to figure it out."

"She was a keen, shrewd girl, and suddenly the knowledge of what it meant came to her like a flash."

"They are going to roll the stones and boulders down upon the 'Liberty Boys' and crush them to death!" she exclaimed to herself.

"For a few moments she was rooted to the spot with horror."

It was as if she were paralyzed.

She could not have moved had her life depended on it.

But this did not last long.

She recovered the use of her faculties quickly, and at once began a careful retreat from the spot.

"I must go down to the 'Liberty Boys' encampment and warn them of their danger," she said to herself.

Her mind was working rapidly, even though her body was moving slowly and cautiously, and she reasoned it out that the Tories would likely not roll the stones down until after the intended victims had gone to sleep.

"They might do the deed sooner," she said to herself, "but I hardly think they will. Still, it will be best for me to make all possible haste. Goodness! wouldn't it be terrible if they should succeed in their awful plan!"

Slowly she made her way along, and when she was far enough away so that she thought she was safe in doing so, she increased her speed.

When she was at what she considered to be a safe distance, she began running, and kept this up till she reached the point where she had ascended. Here she made her way down, and she was almost reckless in making the descent.

So much depended on her getting to the encampment of the "Liberty Boys" in time that she felt she was justified in being a bit reckless.

She was soon at the foot of the bluff, and running around the houses and out into the road, she darted down it at her best speed.

When she reached the spot where the "Liberty Boys" had turned aside from the road she did the same, and when she was close to the encampment she slackened her speed. At the same instant she was hailed:

"Halt! Who comes there?—"

"It is I, Jessie Burton, sir," the girl replied.

"Oh, yes; the girl from the house," said the sentinel.

"Come right along, miss."

Jessie advanced, and when she reached the spot where the sentinel stood, she said:

"I wish to see Mr. Slater, sir."

"All right. Go straight ahead into the camp, miss. You'll find him there."

The girl hastened onward, but was careful not to approach any of the camp-fires, as she did not want that the Tories on the bluff should know she had visited the camp.

"They might suspect why I am here, and roll the stones and boulders down before I have time to warn Mr. Slater," she thought.

Pausing just outside the range of the light of one of the

camp-fires, Jessie called out to some of the youths who were seated near the fire:

"Will you tell Mr. Slater to come here, please? to speak to him."

One of the youths was Bob Estabrook, and he leaped instantly, and approaching the girl, said:

"I will send Dick at once, Miss Burton."

"Thank you, sir."

Bob hastened away, and soon returned, accompanied by Dick.

"You here, Miss Jessie?" the youth remarked, in surprise. "What can we do for you?"

"I have come out to warn you, Mr. Slater," said the

"Warn us—of what?"

"Of a terrible danger which threatens you!"

"A terrible danger which threatens us, miss?"

"Yes. Raymond Marks and his men, the Demon have planned to wipe your party out of existence if they fell sloop, Mr. Slater."

"Indeed? But how could they hope to accomplish Miss Jessie? I have ten men to their one, and have sent out sentinels out, so it would be impossible for them to take by surprise. I don't see how they could injure us."

"Nevertheless, they have the power, Mr. Slater, and are only waiting for you to lie down and go to sleep to put their plan into execution."

"Well, what is it that they intend trying to do, Jessie?"

"They are up at the top of the bluff, right above the camp, Mr. Slater, and they have arranged a great number of huge stones and boulders along the brink of the bluff. When you have gone to sleep they intend pushing them and boulders over and sending them down here to crush your men to pieces!"

The two young men were silent for a few moments, then Bob exclaimed:

"Great Guns, Dick. They'd have made mincemeat of us, wouldn't they?"

"Yes, indeed. But for the information which Jessie brought us they would have done so," was the sober reply. "Miss Jessie, you are our guardian angel."

"You are staying here to benefit me, so why should I be your guardian angel?" the girl replied, her voice tinged with pleasure. "It is no more than right that I should do my best to look after your safety."

"Well, there are not many girls who would be brave enough to risk danger to themselves for some one else's benefit," said Dick. "You have saved the lives of this

city of my brave boys, Miss Jessie, and we shall never forget it."

"Oh, I have done only my duty, Mr. Slater. And now, don't you think you had better get your men away from this dangerous locality as quickly as possible?"

"I hardly think the enemy will roll the stones down until after we have laid down," said Dick. "Still, they might become suspicious and take it into their heads to do it sooner, so I guess I will warn the boys at once, and then have them get out of the way as soon as they can without arousing the suspicion of the Tories up on the bluff."

"That will be best and safest, sir, I think," said Jessie, and then she said that she would return to her home.

The youths bade her good-night, and as soon as she was gone they made the rounds of the youths, and told them what was in the wind.

They were instructed to get back out of the light thrown out by the camp-fires, and then slip away as quickly and silently as possible and lead their horses away to a safe distance.

This was done, the youths obeying to the letter, and twenty minutes later there was not a soul in the camp.

The "Liberty Boys" made their way back up the road, almost to the home of Jessie Burton, and here they stopped and picketed their horses.

"Say, Dick, can't we capture that gang?" asked Bob, when all had been done that was necessary.

"I've been thinking of that, Bob."

"Let's try it."

"I have a good mind to do so."

"Let's do it. We can take twenty men; that will be enough, and maybe the girl will show us the best way to get at the scoundrels on the bluff."

"She will be glad to do so, I am sure."

"Then let's make the move at once; the longer we wait, the less chance we will have of capturing them."

"You are right. They are liable to discover our disappearance at any moment."

"Yes. They will wonder why they don't see some of us stirring."

Dick lost no time in selecting twenty of the "Liberty Boys." Then they made their way to the house, and when Dick rapped on the door the girl's voice called out:

"Who is there?"

"It is I, Dick Slater, Miss Jessie."

The door opened immediately. The girl had been too anxious regarding the safety of the "Liberty Boys" to permit of her going to bed.

"Ah, you have gotten away from there in safety," she exclaimed, a joyous ring in her voice.

"Yes, Miss Jessie, and now I am going to ask you to help us again. You have proved yourself our guardian angel, and now if you will show us how best to reach the spot where the Tories are, we will vote you the bravest and truest little patriot in all South Carolina."

"Oh, you are going to try to capture the Tories?" the girl exclaimed.

"Yes."

"I am glad. I will gladly show you the nearest and best way to reach the spot."

She stepped forth from the house and led the way around it and up the steep hillside, the "Liberty Boys" following. When they reached the top she led the way along, and presently they reached the spot where the Tories had been, only to find them missing.

They had taken fright and flown.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TORIES CAPTURED.

Raymond Marks and his men, after ranging the rocks and boulders along the brow of the precipice, had withdrawn a short distance, thrown themselves down on the ground, and lighting pipes, had started in to take matters easy.

They did not leave one of their number to keep watch on the "Liberty Boys" in the encampment below, for the reason that they did not for one moment think their intended victims would learn of the fate that was to be meted out for them.

They supposed that they would take the "Liberty Boys" entirely by surprise, and that they would not suspect danger until it was upon them.

They thought they had arranged a trap from which their intended victims could not escape.

Suddenly one of their number leaped to his feet in sudden excitement.

"I heer footsteps!" he exclaimed in a cautious voice. "Sumbuddy is comin'!"

The others listened, but could hear nothing. They did not doubt their comrade's statement, however, for he was possessed of very keen hearing, as they had had occasion to discover before this night.

The Tory in question stepped to the edge of the bluff and peered over and downward.

"Come heer," he said in a low voice.

The others obeyed.

"Look!" he commanded.

They stared down into the camp keenly and searchingly.

"See ennybuddy?" the fellow asked.

"No, I don't."

"Neither do I."

"Ther camp seems ter be deserted."

"Thet's right!"

Such were a few of the replies.

"Ye air right, boys," the man said. "Ther fires air burnin', but ther fellers whut wuz theer, hain't theer now."

"Whut does et mean?" asked another.

"Thet they hev foun' out whut we wuz up ter, an' hev skipped out!"

"Do you really think so?" asked Marks, in a disappointed voice.

"Yas, an' they air comin' heer ter go fur us. Et's them thet I heer."

"In that case we had better be getting away from here."

"Thet's whut we hed, cap'n."

They lost no time, but stole away from the spot, and when they were at what they considered a safe distance they paused and listened.

They heard the party of "Liberty Boys" talking when they came to the spot where the Tories had been and realized that they had narrowly missed being wiped out or captured.

They remained where they were till the party went back in the direction from which it had come, and then one said:

"How d'ye s'pose them fellers foun' out whut wuz goin' on up heer?"

"I'll bet ther gal tol' 'em," replied another.

"But how would she know?" asked Raymond Marks.

"Proberbly she cum up heer an' spied onter us. Ye kin bet thet she knows ther groun' all aroun' heer."

"Thet's likely enuff," from another.

"That is probably what she has done," said Marks, in an angry voice. "Well, I'll get even with her before very much longer."

"W'y don' ye go in-fur ter capter ther gang uv rebels, cap'n?" asked one of the men.

"How in the world could a dozen of us capture a hundred?"

"Send word ter ther British commander at Augusta, an' hev 'im send some men up heer."

"By Jove! that's a good idea. I believe I'll do it."

"Et's whut I'd do."

"And it's what I will do. Who will carry the message to Augusta?"

"I'd jes' ez leev take et ez not," said the one who suggested the plan.

"All right. You start at once. Go to Augusta and the commander of the British to send about two hundred men. I think that ought to be sufficient."

"Yes, two hundred orter be plenty."

"All right. You had better go at once, Jim."

"I'll go right erway," and the fellow set out.

"Now I have a job for the rest of us," said Marks.

"What is it?"

"I have made up my mind to capture Jessie Burton and carry her away."

"Goin' ter marry 'er, cap'n?"

"Yes."

"But she sez she hates ye, an' won' marry ye."

"No matter. I will marry her anyway. I have a friend who is an ordained preacher, and he will do my bidding and make us man and wife whether the girl consents or not."

"Wal, we're willin' ter he'p ye, cap'n."

"Yas, she's friendly ter them cusses down theer, an' stealin' and carryin' her orf we'll be gittin' kinder e'asy with 'em fur slippin' erway from ther encampment sp'ilin' our fun."

"All right, boys; but we'll have to wait till later, those fellows down below will be awake for quite awhile and we won't be able to do anything until after they are asleep."

They settled down to take it easy while waiting, and were soon smoking and sitting around at their ease.

They waited about three hours, and then the leader said he thought that it would be safe to make the move.

"Those fellows must all be asleep by this time," he said.

The others thought so, and so they set out.

They made their way to the top of the bluff, almost as far as where the house stood, and then stole down the hillside.

They moved slowly and cautiously, for they feared it might be possible that there were men on guard in the vicinity.

They heard no sound to indicate the presence of anyone, however, and presently they stood at the back door of the house.

Marks tried the door.

It opened to his touch.

He was surprised by this.

"Jove, I would have supposed that the girl, being

here, would have been careful to bar the door," he said to himself.

Then the thought came to him that perhaps she had been startled by the occurrences of the night, and had forgotten to bar the door.

So much the better for us," he said to himself.

Then he entered, followed by his men.

When the last one had entered the door was pushed to, and the bar put up.

Then Marks struck a light, he having a piece of candle in his pocket.

The instant the interior of the room was illumined by the light from the candle, the members of the Demon band saw a sight which came near freezing the blood in their veins.

They had entered the house for the purpose of making a prisoner of a weak, helpless girl.

But, to their amazement and horror, ranged along the walls of the room, which was a good-sized one, were at least a score of determined-looking young men, each and every one of whom held two pistols extended, pointing at the faces of the eleven!

It was a tableau such as is rarely seen.

The Tories, amazement and horror written on their faces, stood motionless and stared at the youths with protruding eyes.

Finally the silence was broken by Dick Slater—for this was a portion of his force, as the reader has already guessed. "Rather a surprise, eh, Mr. Marks?" he said, with a cool smile.

"Who—w-what right have you to be in here?" stammered the Tory leader.

"By right of invitation from Miss Jesssie," was the prompt reply. "Now I'll ask you the same question: What right have you to be in here?"

"None of your business!"

"Oh, none of my business, you say?"

"Yes."

"Well, but I assure you it is some of my business. You were stolen in here like thieves in the night, and I want to know what your intentions were."

"You'll have to keep right on wanting, then."

"Oh, I will?"

"Yes."

"All right. If you won't answer then we shall be forced to take care of you."

"What do you mean?"

"That we shall be forced to make prisoners of you, and keep you until we can learn whether or not you are deserving

of being put to death. In case we find that you deserve death we will string you up to trees, as you were so kindly going to do with me this afternoon."

"You won't do anything of the kind," in a tone of bravado. "Boys, unbar the door, and we will be going."

"Boys, you will do nothing of the kind," said Dick calmly. "The first man that makes a move to unbar the door will get a bullet through his head."

The men hesitated, and stood still.

"Not one was brave enough to take chances on being shot dead."

"By the way," said Dick, "there are only eleven of you. Where is the other member of your band?"

"There is no other member," growled Marks.

"I know better. I know that there are just twelve in your band, and I ask you, where is the other?"

"I don't know."

"I think you are lying, Raymond Marks."

A hoarse growl of rage escaped the man's lips.

He glared at Dick as if he would have been glad to murder him.

"You seem to have the whip-hand of me, now," he said; "but my time will come."

"You had the whip-hand of me this afternoon," smiled Dick; "and now my turn has come."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Going to make prisoners of you."

"Oh, you are?"

"Yes. Kindly raise your hands above your heads."

"And if we don't feel inclined to obey?"

"Then obey anyway."

Marks hesitated, and then of a sudden he blew the light out, plunging the room in darkness.

But at seemingly almost the same instant the door connecting with the next room flew open and in the doorway stood another "Liberty Boy," holding two lighted candles.

The darkness had lasted but an instant, and Marks was caught in the act of making a leap toward the door.

He saw it was no use, however, and paused and stood glaring at Dick, who was smiling in an amused manner.

"You were not so smart as you thought, eh, Mr. Marks?" the youth said.

The reply was an inarticulate growl.

"Now oblige me by raising your hands above your heads," said Dick.

Slowly and hesitatingly the Tories obeyed.

It was evident that it required a great effort on their part to enable them to comply with the command.

"Now, Sam, relieve them of their weapons," ordered Dick.

One of the youths stepped forward and quickly relieved the Tories of their weapons by simply unbuckling the belts from around their waists.

"Now place your hands behind your backs," ordered Dick.

Knowing it was useless to refuse to obey, the Tories did as told.

At a signal from Dick the "Liberty Boys" quickly fastened the prisoners' wrists together with the belts.

"Well, Mr. Marks, what have you to say for yourself?" asked Dick.

"Nothing—save that I will settle with you for this, sooner or later!" The man's tone was vicious.

"I think that it is I who should settle with you, Raymond Marks," was the stern reply. "You would have hanged me this afternoon if I had not succeeded in making my escape, and to-night you would have rolled the stones and boulders down upon us while we slept had we not learned what you intended doing, and made our escape. So it would seem that if there is any settling to be done, it is I who should settle with you."

"That's all right. But I have my own ideas regarding the matter."

"I think it would be a good idea to have a hanging-bee in the morning, Dick," said Bob, with apparent earnestness. "We know these fellows are scoundrels who richly deserve hanging, and we might as well string them up as not."

"I'll think it over, Bob," said Dick. "I have no doubt but that you are right in saying they deserve to hang."

"Oh, you can see that by looking at them. I never saw a more villainous-looking gang, and I've seen some pretty tough ones, at that."

The Tories turned pale, and it was evident that they were frightened. They were helpless in the enemy's hands, and realized that if the youths wished to hang them they would have the power to do so. There was something in the appearance of the youths that made the prisoners feel that there would be no hesitancy should their captors decide in favor of the hanging-bee.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRITISH APPEAR.

Jessie Burton had given Dick a hint that there was a probability that Raymond Marks would attempt to capture her, and he had acted on the hint, by taking up his

quarters in the house, in company with a score of his men, and the result was, as we have seen, the entire Tory party was captured.

The "Liberty Boys" remained in camp near the house all night and the next day, and about four o'clock Jessie's father arrived from Augusta.

He was greatly surprised when he found the "Liberty Boys" there, and was still more surprised when told that they were.

He gave them a warm greeting, and it was evident that he was glad to make their acquaintance.

"I have heard of you many times," he said.

Then he was given another surprise, this one being occasioned by seeing the Tory prisoners.

It did not take long to explain how it happened that the Tories were prisoners, and he thanked Dick heartily for having protected Jessie.

"That is all right," smiled Dick. "Miss Jessie has done more for us than we have done for her. She is our guardian angel, Mr. Burton, and she saved the lives of practically all my men, last night."

"How is that?"

The youth explained, and when he had finished the story said:

"The scoundrels! They ought to be hung."

"That's what I say," said Bob Estabrook. "Let's string 'em up, Dick."

But the youth shook his head.

"No, I would not like to do that, Bob. It would be too much like murder."

"I don't think so. They are not only Tories, but desperadoes and scoundrels in general besides, and it would be good riddance if they were to be put out of the world."

"Well, we will wait awhile, and see how things turn out."

"By the way, Mr. Slater," said Jessie's father, "I have some information which may be of interest and value to you."

"What is it, sir?"

"There is a party of redcoats coming this way, and they will be here before very long."

"How large a party, Mr. Burton?"

"About two hundred."

"So many men as that?"

"Yes."

"Why are they coming here?"

"To try to capture you and your men, I judge."

"Do you think that is it?"

"Yes."

"How would they know of our presence here?"
 "Have you noticed, Mr. Slater, that there are only
 a few of the Tories whom you have prisoners?"
 "Yes, I noticed that."

"Well, they constitute a band known as the Demon
 —and there is one man missing."

"What!" Dick started and looked at the man inquiringly.
 Burton nodded.

"Yes, I saw one of the men who belong to the Demon
 in Augusta this morning, Mr. Slater," he said. "I
 thought that he must be there for some especial purpose,
 so I made all the inquiries I dared, with the result
 I learned that he had brought information with re-
 spect to the presence of a party of rebels up in the moun-
 tains. I found out that this party was in the vicinity of
 home, and I waited only long enough to learn that
 the force of redcoats was getting ready to start, and then
 I went out."

"Well, well! You have brought us valuable information
 from Mr. Burton!"

"Yes, indeed," said Bob.

"What will you do, Mr. Slater? It is too strong a force
 for you to try to engage in battle."

"Well, that depends, sir; if we could ambush them, and
 have the advantage of position, that would offset their
 superior strength. Is there any place where we could con-
 ceal ourselves, and open upon the enemy as it comes along?"

Burton shook his head.

"I don't believe there is," he said. "And you would not
 have time to move your entire force down the road, anyway.
 In my opinion that you had better get your men away,
 into the timber, yonder, at once, for the redcoats may
 be at any moment."

"I will set the boys at work, getting moved," said Dick,
 "then I will go down the trail on a scouting expedi-

"I told the youths to make their way over into the tim-
 ber, making the Tory prisoners with them, and the youths
 did as ordered. As soon as they were out of sight
 in the timber Dick started up the road. He was accom-
 panied by Bob.

"They made their way along the winding trail, and had
 perhaps half a mile when on turning a bend in the
 trail they suddenly came face to face with the British.

"There was a large force of the redcoats, and at their
 head rode an officer.

"The redcoats caught sight of the youths at the same in-
 stant the youths caught sight of them, and gave utter-

ance to yells and darted forward, as if to capture the
 youths.

The "Liberty Boys" were not to be caught, however.

They were old hands at this sort of business, and whirl-
 ing, they ran back up the trail with the speed of startled
 fawns.

They outfooted their pursuers easily, and left them be-
 hind.

They thought they were out of danger, when suddenly
 Jessie Burton came running down the side of a steep em-
 bankment, and called to them to stop.

"There is a band of Tories coming down the road," she
 panted, "and if you continue onward you will be captured.
 You must hide. Hide at once, and I will send the British
 ahead on a wild goose chase, and when they have gone you
 will be enabled to escape."

"Jessie, you are indeed our guardian angel," exclaimed
 Dick. "We will owe you a big debt before we get away
 from this part of the country."

"Never mind that. Hide, quickly," cried the girl, trem-
 bling in nervousness.

The youths realized that there was no time to be lost, and
 so they leaped down into a natural ditch which was made
 by rapidly-running water in the springtime. It was
 close beside the road, but was so overhung by long, rank
 grass that it afforded a capital hiding-place.

As soon as they were concealed the girl turned and ran
 back up the road a few rods, paused, again turned, and
 came walking slowly back down the trail.

At the same instant the British appeared in sight around
 a bend in the road a hundred yards distant from where
 Dick and Bob were concealed.

The officer brought his horse to a standstill, and ad-
 dressed Jessie:

"Young lady, will you tell me if you have seen two
 young men anywhere around here?"

"Yes, sir, I saw them," the beautiful maid of the moun-
 tain said to the officer. "They went in that direction," and
 she pointed up the road.

Dick and Bob, from their hiding-place, heard and saw
 all. They realized that the girl had saved them.

"Thank you, young lady," said the officer, and then he
 rode on, and his soldiers followed, the girl stepping aside to
 let them pass.

Many were the admiring glances she received from the
 redcoats, and some even had the impudence to speak to her.

"Hello, pretty one," said one, with a leer.

"You are sweet as a peach," declared another.

"I wish I had time to stop and talk to you, my girl,"

from another. "I wouldn't mind making love to as pretty a girl as you are."

The girl stood like a statue, and made no reply to any of the remarks addressed to her.

"After we get through with the work we have on hand I am going to hunt you up and make your acquaintance, pretty one," said still another.

But Jessie maintained silence, and the soldiers passed on, and disappeared around the bend in the road.

"Now is your chance!" cried Jessie. "Get away before they come back to look for you."

"But you?" cried Dick.

"I will be all right. I will hasten on around the bend in the road, and then make my way to my home by a round-about way."

"Very well. Good-by for the present, Miss Jessie."

"Good-by. Hurry, before the redcoats get back."

The youths hastened away, and soon disappeared in the timber, and then Jessie made her way down the trail, and around the bend, and from there she took a short cut and reached her home almost as soon as the British did.

She did not go to the house, however, but remained up on the top of the bluff back of the house, and watched things from this vantage-point.

"I hope they won't offer to hurt father," she said to herself. "If they should do so, I will go and tell Dick Slater, and he and his 'Liberty Boys' will settle with the redcoats."

She saw her father standing in the road in front of the house, talking to the British officer, and wished that she might hear what was being said.

* * * * *

The British officer had expected to come again in sight of the two youths, after leaving the girl, but he was disappointed.

He did not sight the young men.

Instead, a party of twenty Tories was met.

As the two parties met the officer reined up his horse and asked:

"Did you meet two young men?"

"No," replied the leader of the Tories.

"Humph, that's strange," the officer declared, and then he wondered if the girl had told him a falsehood.

"Perhaps she was a rebel, and told me a story, to get us to go ahead, while the two were making off in some other direction," he thought. "Well, if such is the case, it can't be helped, now." Then aloud he said:

"Who are you men?"

"We are loyal subjects of the good King George," was the reply.

"That is good. Have you seen a party of rebels in parts?"

The men shook their heads, and the leader said:

"We have not, sir."

"That is strange. We have information to the effect a party of rebels was in this vicinity."

"How large a party, sir?"

"About one hundred men."

Again the men shook their heads, and there was a credulous look on their faces. This was noted by the officer, and he said:

"You doubt the presence of the party in this vicinity?"

"I do," was the reply.

"Nevertheless, we have positive information that there is a party of at least one hundred rebels in this vicinity, and we have come up here to wipe them out."

"There's a house up the road a little ways. Perhaps a man who lives there will be able to give you some information."

"Do you know what his name is?"

"Yes; it is James Burton."

"That's the name of the settler we are looking for," the informant said the rebels in question were encamped to the house of a man named Burton. We were told James Burton himself was not at home—that he was in America—but that his daughter was at home, and that she could tell us all about the rebels."

"Well, Burton is at home now."

"He is?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I saw him as we came past there."

"Ha! then I think I understand the disappearance of the rebels. He has come home and warned them of our coming."

"Quite likely, sir. He is reputed to be a rebel in his own right."

"Well, we will go and have an interview with him, if he has warned the rebels and enabled them to escape. It will go hard with him."

"It might not be a bad idea to string him up to serve as a warning to others who are inclined to take sides with the king," the Tory suggested.

"I'll attend to his case if I make up my mind that he is guilty."

They made their way up the road, the Tories taking the lead about and leading the way, and as they moved along

came to the officer that the girl he had addressed ways on the road, and who had said the two young and come up the road, might have been the settler's.

ely that is the truth of the matter," he thought. he sent us on our way, while the rebels were making some other direction. Well, I will be able to get even through her father."

were soon at the house, and Mr. Burton was called in peremptory tones.

me here. I wish to ask you a few questions," the officer cried.

settler came out to the road, and looked at the officer inquiringly.

at do you want?" he asked.

ish to know what has become of that party of rebels who is encamped here last night."

Burton put on a capital assumption of surprise and silence.

on't know what you mean, sir," he said. "I have seen no rebel party."

re was one encamped near here last night, sir, and I did not see it you have knowledge of the fact that it is there."

eg to say that I know nothing about any rebel party," was the calm reply. "I was away last night, I was out, and did not get home till a short time ago, and I have seen no such party."

your daughter knows all about it. Where is

daughter?" Mr. Burton started, and a startled look came into his eyes. He was afraid that Jessie might get into trouble.

your daughter," said the officer. "Bring her here. I wish to question her, and mark you, if she tries to deceive me it will go hard with both of you."

CHAPTER IX.

THE "LIBERTY BOYS" STRIKE.

sure you, sir, that neither myself nor daughter has been to deceive you," protested Mr. Burton.

am glad of that, and for your own sakes I hope you will tell the truth."

the truth, sir."

well. Now bring your daughter before me."

The settler hesitated.

"She is not at home," he said.

"Not at home?"

"No."

"Where is she?"

"She has gone to the home of a neighbor."

"When did she go?"

"A half or three quarters of an hour ago."

"Which direction did she go?"

Mr. Burton pointed up the road.

"In that direction, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

The officer nodded his head.

"I thought so," he said. "It was she that we met up the road a ways."

"You met her, you say?"

"Yes, and she sent us on a wild-goose chase."

Mr. Burton paled.

"I don't understand," he said.

"I will explain. We had met, and were in pursuit of, a couple of young men who looked to me as if they were rebels, and when we met the girl I asked her if she had seen the two young men in question. She said she had, and that they had come on up the road in this direction. We hastened onward, but saw nothing of the two, and met this party of loyalists, who said they had not met the young men in question. Thinking it over afterward, I made up my mind that the girl had deliberately misinformed us, and that even as she was talking to me the rebels were either hidden near by and made their escape after we had gone, or were at that moment making off in some other direction."

Mr. Burton looked worried.

"I am confident you are mistaken, sir," he said. "My daughter would have no object in misinforming you."

"Would she not?"

"No."

"Are you loyal to the king?"

The question was an abrupt one, and the settler was plainly disconcerted. He hesitated, glanced at the Tories who stood near and who, as he knew, were sure he was a patriot, and then said:

"I'll tell you, sir. I am neither a loyalist nor a patriot."

"What are you, then?"

"I am neutral."

The officer's lips curled in scorn.

"That won't do, sir," he said, sternly. "Neutrality is not logical or permissible. It is the coward's refuge, noth-

ing more. If you are not for the king you are against him."

"I do not look at it that way, sir."

"Perhaps not. But I do."

At this instant a man was seen hurrying toward them, and when he drew near it was seen that he was the Tory who had come to Augusta with the information of the presence in the vicinity of the party of "rebels."

He was excited and seemed worried.

"What is the matter?" asked the officer, as the man drew near.

"You remember, sir, that I left you to go to the place where my comrades have a permanent camp?" the fellow replied.

"Yes."

"Well, when I got there they were not there."

"No?"

"No; and they have not been there."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, it looks as if they have got into trouble, sir."

"You think so?"

"I do. They would have been at their camping-place if nothing had happened to them."

The officer started.

"What could have happened to them?"

"The party of rebels may have captured them, sir."

"So that is what you suspect, is it?"

"Yes. And if you please, sir, I believe this man, Jim Burton, can tell something about the matter."

All eyes were at once turned on the settler, who shook his head.

"I know nothing whatever about the matter," he said. "I got home only an hour ago, and have seen nothing of the party of rebels you speak of or of the other party consisting of this man's comrades."

"Of course you would say so," growled the Tory.

"It is the truth."

"I suppose you would say the same thing under any and all circumstances?" queried the officer.

"I would," was the prompt reply.

"Well, I don't believe you are telling the truth when you say you know nothing about the two parties in question."

"You do not?"

"No. I am confident you know where those rebels are at this very moment, and I am going to ask you to tell me where they are."

The settler shook his head.

"I cannot do it."

"You mean that you won't do it."

"No, that I can't. I don't know where they are."

"I think you are lying," was the stern reply, "and I am determined that you shall give me the information."

"If I haven't it, how can I give it to you?"

"But you have it, and I am sure that we can make you remember all about the matter."

Then the officer gave the order to tie the settler's hands together behind his back.

When this had been done he ordered that a rope be placed around the man's neck.

This was done, and he next ordered that the prisoner be led underneath the limb of a tree standing near at hand.

This was done, and then he rode up in front of the settler, and said sternly:

"Now you can do one of two things—tell the truth and give us information regarding the whereabouts of the rebels, or die!"

Mr. Burton was pale.

He realized that he was in great danger.

But he was determined that he would not tell where the "Liberty Boys" had gone.

"I do not know where the rebels are, sir," he said, in a firm tone as he could command.

"Pull down on the rope," ordered the officer, and the soldiers obeyed.

Mr. Burton was pulled up till he was standing on his tip-toes.

"Now will you speak?" cried the officer.

No, he would not. The settler was gritty, and he shook his head to signify that he would not speak.

"Up with him, men," roared the officer; "we'll hang this scoundrel. That's the way to treat stubborn rebel sympathizers!"

The next moment the body of the patriot was dangling in the air.

* * * * *

Jessie, watching from the top of the bluff, felt that her father was in great danger.

"I am afraid that they may injure him, perhaps murder him, unless they are interfered with," she said to herself, and then she thought of Dick Slater and the "Liberty Boys."

"I will try to get word to them of his danger," she thought, and she at once set out.

She had to go a roundabout way, for the redcoats were between her and the point where she expected to find the youths, but she made all possible haste, and a few minutes

ter came to the place where the "Liberty Boys" had gone to temporary camp.

"Oh, Mr. Slater, I fear the redcoats will kill my father," he cried. "What shall we do?"

"You need do nothing, Miss Jessie," was the quiet reply. "Just remain here, and I will take my 'Liberty Boys' and give the redcoats a surprise."

"Hasten, then, please, Mr. Slater, for they were talking of my father, and I fear they may hang or shoot him at any moment."

"We will go at once, Miss Jessie," was the reply, and then Dick told the youths to follow him.

He struck out at once, all the youths save four or five who remained to guard the prisoners following him, and they were soon at the edge of the timber opposite the home of Mr. Burton.

A glance showed Dick that they were only just in time, that the redcoats, in compliance with the order of their commander, had just pulled the settler into the air, and were hanging struggling at the end of the rope.

Dick gave the signal, and the "Liberty Boys" fired a volley from their muskets.

It came so unexpectedly that it caused almost a stampede in the ranks of the redcoats. A number were killed and many wounded, and shouts, yells and curses went up, intermingled with which were groans of agony from the wounded.

The men who had had hold of the rope let go on the instant, and Mr. Burton fell to the ground.

The officer was greatly surprised and dismayed by the sudden attack, but he was a brave man, and quickly recovered his composure.

He drew his sword, and waving it above his head, cried:

"Charge the scoundrels, men. Charge them, and wipe the rebels off the face of the earth."

The men obeyed the order in so far as charging was concerned, and rushed toward the timber, yelling at the top of their voices.

"Fire!" roared the officer.

They fired a volley from their muskets.

Needless to say, they did not do much damage, for the "Liberty Boys" were protected by the trees.

It was now the youths' turn, and at the word from Dick they fired two pistol-volleys, doing considerable execution in the redcoats' ranks.

Then the "Liberty Boys" retreated, doing so with such celerity and noiselessness that the redcoats scarcely realized that the enemy was escaping them.

When they reached the edge of the timber and rushed

in among the trees, it was to find that there was nothing there to bayonet save the trees, and they were a disappointed and disgusted lot of men.

Then, while they stopped and stared about them in wonder, there came two more pistol-volleys and a number of their men went down, dead and wounded.

Again they rushed forward, eager to get at their lively foes, but the "Liberty Boys" retreated even more rapidly than the redcoats advanced, and kept out of the way.

In disgust the British paused and fired two volleys from their pistols, but the enemy was out of range, and no damage was done.

The officer, who had dismounted and followed his men into the timber, now ordered that they return to the house. He had been taught a lesson. He had supposed that it would be an easy matter to wipe out the party of "rebels," but now he realized that it was going to be a difficult matter.

"They are fighters," he said to himself, "and they seem to be as much at home in the timber as the red men of the forest."

When they returned to the house another disappointment awaited him. The settler, whom he had intended to hang, had disappeared.

He had managed to get the rope from around his neck and make his escape.

"Curse the luck!" the officer growled. "We have made a bad start, but I will wipe those rebels off the face of the earth, or die trying. We will take up our quarters here at the house, and stay till we get a good chance at the scoundrels."

He told his men what he had decided to do, and they were well satisfied. They went into camp near the house, and sentinels were placed out, to make it impossible for the "rebels" to surprise them a second time.

It was now nearing sundown, and the soldiers, after burying the dead and carrying the wounded into Mr. Burton's house and dressing their wounds, built campfires, and began cooking their suppers.

When they had eaten their suppers they settled down to take it easy. "We'll get the rebels to-morrow," was their thought.

But would they?

CHAPTER X.

THE ALLIED FORCES STRIKE A SEVERE BLOW.

The "Liberty Boys" had moved their camp farther away, for they feared the redcoats might send out scouts and find their encampment.

After supper Dick started out on a scouting and spying expedition, and was soon within two hundred yards of the British encampment.

He stood in the trail, and watched the British for a few minutes, and was on the point of starting to advance, for the purpose of trying to discover where the sentinels were stationed when his quick ears detected the sound of hoofbeats.

The hoofbeats sounded from farther down the trail.

"Now, who can that be?" the youth asked himself. "Is it more redcoats?"

He thought this likely, for there were more British and Tories in the vicinity than patriots.

"Still, it might be patriots," he thought, "and in that case it will be best that they be warned not to advance too far, for fear of being heard by the redcoats. I'll move down that way and meet them, and if they are redcoats I will let them pass me, but if I think they are patriots I will halt them and warn them of their danger."

Dick made his way down the trail as rapidly as possible, and when the sound of the hoofbeats told him the strangers were close at hand, he stepped aside, and concealing himself behind some bushes growing beside the road, he waited.

The night was fairly dark, but not so dark but that it would be possible to see anything or person with tolerable distinctness if the thing or person were close at hand.

"I think I shall be able to determine whether or not the newcomers are friends or foes," the youth thought.

Closer and closer sounded the hoofbeats, and Dick, who was a good judge of such things, decided that there must be quite a party of horsemen.

"I should say there are at least fifty of them," he said to himself; "well, I hope they will turn out to be friends."

Soon a dark moving body loomed up down the trail, and as it came nearer it became disintegrated, and it was possible to make out that it consisted of a number of horsemen.

Closer and closer they came, and soon the leading horsemen were almost opposite Dick.

He was straining his eyes in an attempt to make out whether or not the newcomers were friends, when one of the horses gave a snort, and rearing up, wheeled half around, almost unseating the rider.

"Here! what do you mean by such actions, Liberty?" cried the owner.

Instantly Dick recognized the voice. It was that of Francis Marion, otherwise known as the "Swamp Fox," one of the most noted partisan generals in the South. Dick was personally acquainted with Marion, and had been as-

sociated with him in several fights against the British and Tories, and he was sure he could not be mistaken. Another thing that made him certain he was right was the name that the horseman had applied to his horse. Dick remembered that Marion had a horse named "Liberty."

Being sure of his ground, therefore, Dick unhesitatingly stepped forth from behind the bushes, and said:

"General Marion, I wish to have a few words with you."

Exclamations of amazement escaped the lips of the horsemen who were near enough to hear and see what had occurred.

"Eh, what's that?" exclaimed Marion. "Who are you, sir, that seems to know me?"

"You know me well, General Marion."

"Your voice sounds familiar, but I can't place you, sir, and it is so dark I can't see your face with any distinctness."

"I am Dick Slater."

"What!" exclaimed the "Swamp Fox." "Are you indeed my friend, Dick Slater?"

Murmurs of surprise went up from the men.

"I am indeed your friend, Dick Slater, General Marion."

"What in the world are you doing here?"

"That is the question I was about to ask you."

"It is easy to answer, Dick. I am just scouting around keeping a lookout for small parties of redcoats or Tories with a view to wiping them out of existence."

"Well, that is just about what I and my 'Liberty Boys' are doing here."

"So I supposed."

"Yes, but if you had gone on a bit farther, general, you would have found a party of redcoats that might have proved to be too big to suit you."

"Ah!" with interest. "Then there is a party of redcoats near here?"

"Very near, general. You would have been right on them in a few moments."

"How large a party is it, Dick?"

"There are two hundred in it—less the number that our 'Liberty Boys' wiped out this evening."

"Ah! Then you have had an engagement with them?"

"Yes. They were about to hang a patriot friend of mine, and we pitched into them, and managed to strike them such a blow and keep them so busy that the patriot made his escape."

"That was good. And the redcoats are in camp near here, you say?"

"Yes—not more than a third of a mile away."

"And where are your 'Liberty Boys'?"

"They are not much more than half a mile away, over in the timber."

"Good! Say, Dick, what is to hinder us from making an attack on the redcoats to-night, and practically exterminating them?"

"I don't see that there is anything to hinder, general."

"Nor do I. All we will have to do will be to wait till about midnight, when their encampment is wrapped in slumber, and then we can make the attack with some assurance that we will be successful."

"You are right. Well, will you stay here, or will you come to my encampment?"

"We will go back up the trail a little ways, to where I noticed a nice place for an encampment, and will go into camp there."

"Very well; and I will bring my party here at eleven o'clock, and we can make the advance together."

"That will be a good plan."

The "Swamp Fox" and his men turned and rode back up the trail, while Dick made his way back to where his "Liberty Boys" were encamped.

"We are all right, Bob," he told his comrade, when he reached the camp.

"What do you mean, Dick?" Bob was all eagerness.

"I ran across an old friend, over on the trail, Bob."

"Ran across an old friend?"

"Yes."

"Who was he?"

"You'd never guess."

"I suppose not, so tell me."

"Francis Marion!"

"What!—the 'Swamp Fox'?"

"Yes."

"Has he his men with him?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Sixty."

"And they are going to combine their force with ours and help us thrash the redcoats?"

"That is the understanding."

"Good! That is fine, Dick."

"I think so."

"Yes; Marion's men are fighters, I tell you. We will make the redcoats think they have been struck by a mountain tornado."

"So we will, Bob."

"Why didn't Marion and his men come here?"

"They thought they might as well remain close to the

trail, where it will be no trouble to get ready to make the attack."

"And we will join them, and advance with them?"

"Yes."

"At what time will the attack be made?"

"Midnight."

"That will be a good time. They will all be asleep, and before they get fully woke up we will have them thrashed."

"That is what we reckon on doing."

They proceeded to do so, and the "Liberty Boys" were delighted when they learned that their old allies, the "Swamp Fox's" men, were close at hand, and would assist them in making an attack on the British that night.

"We'll wipe the redcoats off the face of the earth."

"They will never know what struck them."

"Good-by, redcoats."

"They would have done better to have remained in Augusta."

Such were a few of the remarks given utterance to by the youths. The "Liberty Boys" were not much given to boasting, but they had fought in concert with Marion and his men before, and knew what terrible fighters the patriot partisans were, and they had all the confidence in the world in their ability to thrash the redcoats.

When eleven o'clock came the "Liberty Boys" started to join Marion's men. None of the youths wished to remain behind, and so, after due consideration, he decided to leave the Tory prisoners unguarded. He could not see how they could possibly escape, if hands and feet both were bound, and this was done. Then, each youth leading his horse, for they did not know but Marion's plan would include the use of the horses, they moved away through the forest.

They soon reached the trail, and a quarter of a mile down it they came to the encampment of their allies.

Marion welcomed the youths, and at once arrangements were made to start on the march for the British encampment.

It was decided to not use the horses, so they were left at the encampment under a guard of four men. This settled, the combined forces set out.

They marched up the trail, and were within one hundred yards of the British camp before they were challenged.

The instant the sentinel called out, "Who comes there?" the patriots made a rush forward, it having been agreed that this should be the signal for a charge.

The terrified and surprised sentinel succeeded in discharging his musket, but did no damage, he firing over the heads of the enemy, and the next moment he was knocked down and run over, being trampled by scores of heavy feet.

His shot had aroused the camp, and the redcoats leaped up and reached for their muskets. Before they could use their weapons, however, they received a volley, the bullets raining in among them and doing terrible execution.

In another moment, almost, the enemy was upon them, and it was a hand-to-hand combat, with the advantage all on the side of the patriots.

The redcoats had just been aroused from sound slumber, and were muddled, scarcely knowing what had happened. The result was that they were bayoneted with the utmost ease by their wideawake enemies, and before they fully realized what was occurring they had lost half their number.

With the knowledge of what was taking place came the realization that they could not hope to offer successful resistance, and the result was that the survivors fled at the top of their speed, leaving their weapons behind them.

The encounter was over almost before it had got started, and the patriots were the victors.

They were jubilant, and gave utterance to cheers of triumph.

"Well, Dick, our attack was a full and complete success," said General Marion.

"Yes; we routed the enemy, sure enough."

"And killed about half their number."

"Yes, and those who fled left their weapons behind, so we need not fear an attack from them."

"No, their teeth have been extracted, and they will be unable to bite."

Several of the patriots had been wounded, but none had been killed, and now, moved by a feeling of pity for the suffering men, the patriots looked after the wounded redcoats, and carried them into the settler's house, and made them as comfortable as was possible.

When this had been done, Dick sent a dozen of the "Liberty Boys" to bring the Tory prisoners to the house, it having been decided to make a camp near the building.

The youths who were sent to attend to this matter soon returned with the information that the prisoners were not there.

"They have escaped?" exclaimed Dick.

"Yes."

"Well, that is strange."

"You are right. We tied them tight and fast, and I don't see how they managed to get loose."

"They must have had aid from some one."

"Quite likely. But who could it have been?"

"Perhaps it was the other member of the gang."

"You mean the twelfth man, who brought the redcoats to this place."

"Yes."

"True, it may have been him."

And in this surmise they were correct.

The Tory had left the British encampment about ten o'clock, and had started off through the timber in search of the encampment of the patriot force. He wasted more than an hour by going in the wrong direction, but at last was fortunate enough to stumble upon his comrades, tied tight and fast, trounced up like turkeys ready to be taken to market.

He hastened to cut them free of their bonds, and then he eagerly questioned them as to how they came to be in such a predicament.

"We were the prisoners of a gang of rebels," said Raymond Marks, "and they have gone to attack the British. Let us hasten to warn our friends, or they will be taken by surprise."

At this instant the roar of the volley which the "Liberty Boy" fired as they attacked the redcoats came to their ears, and the Tories stood still and listened.

"It's too late, now, cap'n," said one of the men. "The rebels hev done made ther attack."

"I guess you are right," said Marks.

"Ther bes' think we kin do is ter git outer this, cap'n," said another. "They'll be back heer arter us purty soon."

This seemed to meet with the approval of the majority, and so Raymond Marks gave the order to start. They did so, and made their way from the spot at a rapid walk.

They went in a direction which would take them around to the farther side of Mr. Burfon's house, and presently they came across some of the fleeing redcoats and learned that the British force had been routed.

"At least half our men are dead or wounded," said one fellow, "and as we fled and left our weapons, we are helpless and are going to get back to Augusta just as quick as possible."

"I guess we had better make ourselves scarce, too, boys," said Marks, and the others coincided in this view of the case.

Next morning the dead redcoats were buried, and that afternoon word was sent to the British in Augusta to come and get their wounded, which was done the next day, and no questions asked.

Indeed, there was no need of asking questions, for the redcoats who had escaped had reached Augusta with the news of the presence of a large force in the mountains, and as it was believed that the force was larger than it really was, no further attempt was made to try to get at the "Liberty Boys."

A portion of Dick's force encountered the Demon Dozen a few days later, in the depths of the forest, and after a

lively engagement, routed the scoundrels, killing six of them. One of those killed was Raymond Marks, and as he was the leader, the others broke up and scattered, this ending the career of a bad band of men.

Soon afterward the "Liberty Boys" bade good-by to Jessie Burton, whom they had learned to speak of as their "guardian angel," and took their departure, there being work to be done in another part of the State.

THE END.

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